

Project Narrative

The narrative below follows the format provided on the Flathead County Conditional Use Permit Application Form but also includes an introduction to orient the reader to the general nature of the proposal. Included with this narrative are a vicinity map, site plan, and a copy of the septic permit to help clarify the discussion herein.

Introduction

East Glacier Holdings, LLC seeks to expand the use of its existing helicopter landing pad on property located at 5560 Highway 93 South near Whitefish. The landing pad was previously approved on or about April 30, 2018 for non-commercial use. The purpose of this application is to expand the use of the existing, approved landing pad to commercial use in addition to its current non-commercial use. The expectation is that the pad would continue to be used for private use, such as flying passengers to events in Flathead County and to the landowner's ranch by False Summit. The owner would like to operate helicopters and other technological advances in rotorcraft to take passengers to destinations in Montana, such as outdoorsman destinations. Potentially, the owner would also like to use the landing pad for beyond visual line-of-site (BVLOS) drone flying for commercial purposes related to applications such as real estate, LIDAR, and other similar purposes to serve the community. The landing pad will also provide a benefit to the public, as it will be made available to the A.L.E.R.T. Air Ambulance for medical emergencies and to the U.S. Forest Service and related state and local forestry divisions for firefighting and similar purposes.

It is expected that the commercial operations at the pad will be very sporadic. Operations will typically take place during daylight hours and would not take place after 9:00 p.m. except in the case of emergencies for authorized emergency groups (e.g., operations by A.L.E.R.T. Air Ambulance, U.S. Forest Service, etc.). The owner expects that most operations would take place during the weekend and approximately two other days during the week, when active. The owner expects that, on average, commercial operations will not exceed a few flights per week, when active, but during the first year or two of operation, commercial use will be even less than that and will be very light.



Photo #1. A.L.E.R.T. Air Ambulance using the heliport on the property.

The existing landing pad and surrounding area has been designed based on the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) 2012 Advisory Circular on Heliport Design.¹ Flights will avoid Glacier International Airport, Kalispell Airport and all flyways. All operations and practices will comply with FAA regulations.

The owner desires to be a good neighbor and not unduly disturb neighboring homes or businesses. In addition to the screening that has already been installed along the eastern border with the adjoining U.S. Highway 93S which provides both visual and noise attenuation, the owner will require operations to be conducted such that arriving and departing flights are to and from the northeast and southwest, minimizing flights over residential areas, to the extent such arrivals and departures are consistent with safety and FAA concerns.

¹ Available at: https://www.faa.gov/documentLibrary/media/Advisory_Circular/150_5390_2c.pdf

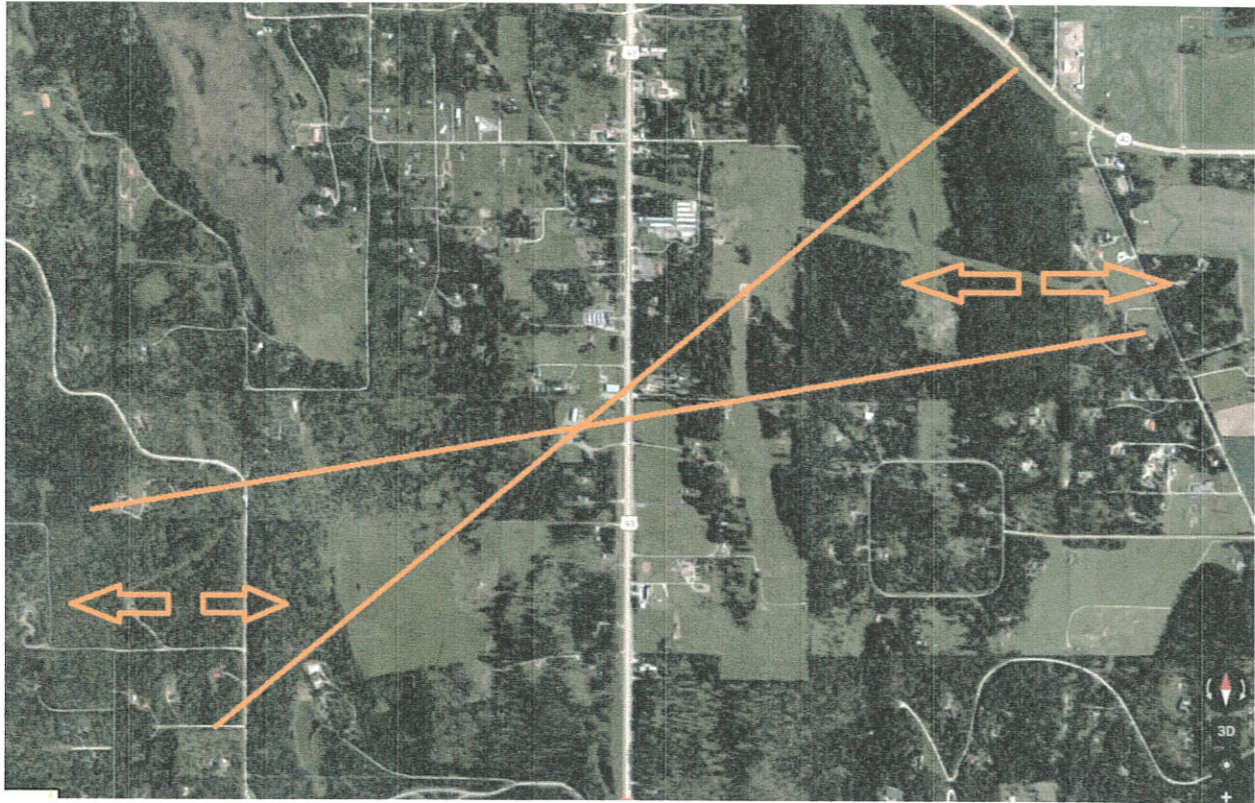


Photo #2. Flights will depart and approach from the northeast and southwest. As can be seen from the photograph, there are few homes or businesses located in the approach and departure areas which will allow the rotorcraft to gain significant altitude before traveling over sensitive areas.

To further abate any noise from the operations, helicopters will be instructed to maintain flyover altitudes of at least 1,000 feet above ground level (AGL) for light/small helicopters and 2,000 feet AGL for medium helicopters, to the extent such altitude is consistent with FAA requirements and safety considerations. This flyover height is recommended by the Helicopter Association International's *Fly Neighborly Guide*.² Of course, during landing and takeoff, the altitudes AGL will be lower, but pilots will be instructed to achieve and maintain flyover altitude as quickly as safely possible. At the recommended flyover height, the noise level is compatible with the generally accepted criterion of 65 dB(A) max 2 for flyover of noise-sensitive areas. Because the helicopters will be flying over sparsely populated areas to begin with, this noise level should be very compatible with existing land uses in the area. Drone operations will be at lower altitudes as required by the FAA, but drones do not pose a significant noise issue.

The property consists of two parcels totaling approximately 38 acres in size. The eastern parcel, where the landing pad is located, was previously used as a lumber yard by Rocky Mountain

² <http://www.phpa.org/fly-neighborly/> visited May 6, 2019

Timber Company. Because of the large size of the property and the distance from adjoining uses, the noise impact to neighboring properties will be limited. Besides having a low number of operations at the facility, the distance itself creates a significant drop-off in the sound level that impacts neighboring properties. One study that measured the sound levels from a landing pad to sound sensors at 100 ft. and 400 ft. stated this phenomenon as follows: "The attenuation of aircraft noise is significant from 100 ft. to 400 ft. . . . In fact, the average drop-off of 17 dB(A) between 100 and 400 ft. suggests an 8.5 dB(A) drop-off with doubling of distance."³

Access is from Highway 93 S via an existing private drive. There are four buildings, one office building (labeled Building 1 on the site plan) and three others used for shop space and storage, which are proposed to be used as hangar space if needed. No new buildings are planned. Building 1 is served by an onsite well and drain field.

Topographically, running north-south through the central part of the property is a mild ridge. The property drops gently from the ridge to the east and west. The landing pad is located near the southwest area of the eastern parcel. The 20-acre parcel immediately to the west is also owned by the applicant and undeveloped. Due to the topography, the landing pad is not visible from U.S. Highway 93S. Additionally, the extra landscape screening installed at the County's request pursuant to the existing conditional use permit provides additional visual and sound screening.

³ Falzarano, Sarah and Levy, Laura. *Sound levels of helicopters used for administrative purposes at Grand Canyon National Park*. NPS Report No. GRCA-07-05 (20 Oct. 2007).



Photo #3. This photo shows the view looking east from the helipad toward the highway, which is not visible.

An existing sign is located on the property advertising its location. This sign structure may be used to orient users to the helipad at some point in the future, although there are no plans to advertise at this time.

The property contains vegetative buffer areas along the north, south and west boundaries in general compliance with the Highway 93 South Whitefish Overlay Zoning District. The buffer along the east boundary now has added landscaping according to the previous request of the county in connection with the existing conditional use permit.

Review Criteria

A. Site Suitability.

The site is suitable for the use. This includes:

(1) Adequate usable space.

The property is approximately 38 acres in size. The helipad is located in a cleared field measuring roughly 1.5 acres in size (photo #4). This area contains no power lines or other aviation hazards. Building #1 on the attached site plan could provide

administrative offices and restrooms. The other buildings, labeled 2, 3 and 4 on the site plan, could be used as hangar space if needed in the future.



Photo #4. Looking west at the existing helipad.

(2) Adequate access

Access is from Highway 93 via a private, gravel surfaced drive. Highway 93 is a five-lane highway along the property. Sight distance from the highway intersection is well over 500 feet to the north and south. The entrance to the property is restricted through a controlled, locked gate at the front entrance.

(3) Absence of environmental constraints

No steep slopes, floodplains, high fire hazard areas, wetlands or other environmental constraints are located on the property.

B. Appropriateness of Design.

The existing heliport provides the most convenient and functional use of this portion of the property. Consideration of the expanded use should include:

(1) Parking scheme

At the County's request, the applicant paved the parking lot in front of Building 1 (photo #5 below). No additional parking is proposed at this time. However, the property contains ample space should additional parking be required.



Photo #5. Existing parking area and office building.

(2) Traffic circulation

The property includes a gravel surfaced drive that extends to all of the buildings. There is ample space on the existing driving and parking areas for vehicle movement. Outside of each building is ample space to turn around. No traffic circulation problems are anticipated. No changes to the circulation pattern are proposed at this time. At some point the landowner may choose to build a service road from the driveway to the helipad.

(3) Open space

The majority of the property is open space. Potential navigation concerns could relate to trees surrounding the property, buildings and overhead power lines. The closest overhead power line is more than 200 feet to the northeast of the helipad site. Trees have been cleared from the southwest approach to the landing pad, in accordance with the request from the County pursuant to the existing conditional use permit.

(4) Fencing, screening

To the north, south and west, the property is bordered by trees that meet the landscaping and buffering requirements of the Highway 93 South Whitefish Overlay Zoning District. At the County's request a vegetative buffer has been planted along the eastern property boundary but due to the topography, the helipad is already not visible from the highway. No fencing is proposed.

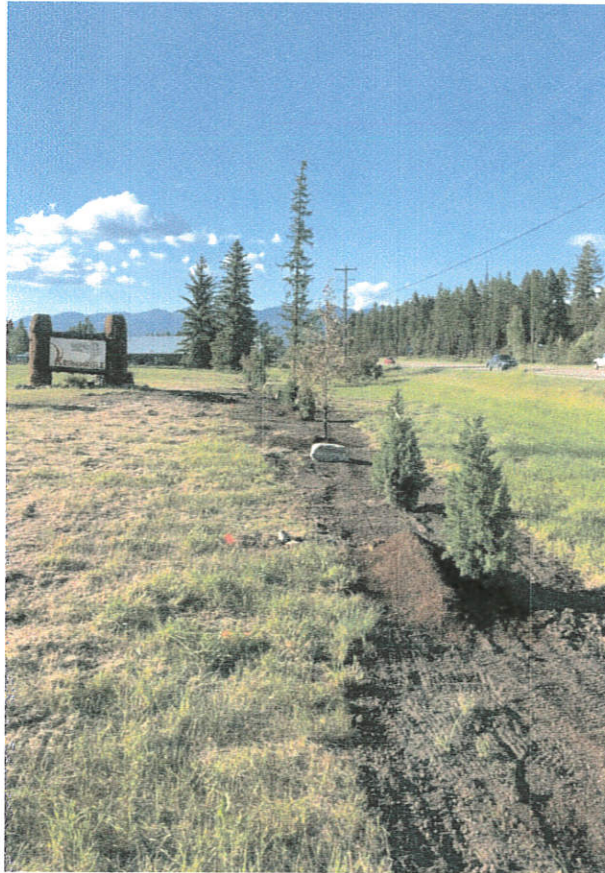


Photo #6. Vegetative buffer installed along the eastern property boundary.

(5) Landscaping

With a helipad, it is prudent to plant little vegetation to reduce the potential for conflicts. No additional landscaping is proposed.

(6) Signage

An existing sign with two faces approximately 32 square feet each is located along the Highway 93 frontage. At this time, there are no plans to advertise the helipad

but the sign structure could be used in the future in accordance with the zoning requirements.

(7) Lighting

Safety lighting is mounted on the pad and the windsock. This lighting is not visible from the highway. Minimal additional lighting, if any, is expected.



Photo #7. Guidance and safety lighting mounted on the landing pad.

C. Availability of Public Services and Facilities

The following services and facilities are to be available and adequate to serve the needs of the use as designed and proposed:

(1) Sewer

The office building is served by an onsite septic system that was permitted in 2006 under permit number 06-3367 (attached). The permit indicates the septic system was designed for an office and two-bedroom home so it should be sufficient to support the helipad users.

(2) Water

An existing well serves the office building and grounds.

(3) Storm water drainage

The current site retains all storm water generated from the helipad. No additional runoff would occur as a result of the expansion of the use of the property.

(4) Fire protection

Based on Map 7.3 of the Flathead County Growth Policy, the property is located within the jurisdiction of the Whitefish Fire District. No unusual or extraordinary needs for service are anticipated.

(5) Police protection

The property is located within the jurisdiction of the Flathead County Sheriff's Office. No unusual or extraordinary needs for service are anticipated.

(6) Streets

The property is accessed from Highway 93 and contains an internal private driveway and parking areas with adequate capacity to serve this land use. No other streets would be impacted by this proposal. The entrance to the property is restricted through a controlled, locked gate at the front entrance.

D. Immediate Neighborhood Impact

The proposed use will not be detrimental to surrounding neighborhoods in general.

Typical negative impacts which extend beyond the proposed site include:

(1) Excessive traffic generation

The helipad is intended to be used for private and commercial use. No food and beverage, retail or other new land uses are proposed that would generate traffic. The helipad is expected to generate few additional vehicle trips, which can safely be accommodated by the existing highway access.

(2) Noise or vibration

See the discussion of noise contained in the Introduction section, above. The property is located along Highway 93, where background traffic noise is steady. Some additional noise can be expected to be generated from the use of the helipad. The helipad is located more than 150 feet from any property boundaries. The nearest home is several hundred feet to the southeast of the pad area. Between the pad and the home is a mature vegetative buffer that will mitigate the noise impacts. Mature buffers also line the north and west boundaries. The pad area is separated from Highway 93 by a gentle ridge that will obstruct noise from materially impacting passersby.

The pad will be used primarily during the day, when traffic noise is regular. The operator of the facility will follow all noise abatement requirements of the FAA. Additionally, pilots are generally expected to maintain as high an altitude as practical and safe when passing over noise sensitive areas and minimize the amount of time

over populated areas. Pilots will be directed to approach and depart to and from the northeast and southwest where the land is mostly undeveloped, which will minimize the noise impact.

(3) Dust, glare or heat

The pad will be a well maintained paved or concrete surface that is not expected to generate significant dust or heat. The pad is intended to be used primarily during the daytime, although safety lighting is installed as per FAA guidance. Between the pad and any homes or other land uses are vegetative buffers along the north, south and west property boundaries that will mitigate visual impacts.

(4) Smoke, fumes, gas, or odors

Helicopters do not typically generate substantial smoke, fumes, gas or odors. No unusual impacts are expected from this facility. Given the size and open nature of the area, no significant adverse impacts are expected.

(5) Inappropriate hours of operation

The helipad area will typically be used during daytime hours. The applicants intend to adhere to any regulations related to operations after certain hours and keep the pad generally hidden or obscured from sight. Use is expected to be sporadic and light (see Introduction section, above.)